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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MILAN 000176

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SUBJECT: WHO WILL RIDE THE NEXT WAVE OF LEGA NORD
LEADERSHIP?

REF: MILAN 173

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Classified By: A/CG Ben Wohlauser for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) As mentioned in reftel, the 67 year-old founder of the Northern League (LN) political party, Umberto Bossi, remains in poor health due to a stroke he suffered in 2004. Though Bossi continues an active and provocative political life, constantly in the media and public eye, judging by appearances and our personal interactions with him he seems decidedly unwell. He has refused to quit smoking, and requires a personal assistant to ensure he gets up and ready, and stays on track during the day. As Bossi is the undisputed leader and spiritual guru of the party, his decline is a topic (unspoken generally) of concern among Leghisti and has led to much speculation over the future direction and philosophy of this increasingly mainstream (at least north of the Po River) party. There is a clear first rank of "colonels" in their 50s, including current Ministers Roberto Maroni and Roberto Calderoli and former Minister Roberto Castelli, who will probably stake claims to the party leadership when Bossi goes. However, the longer term picture will depend also on those young LN leaders who are being primed for influential seats at the table. The following cable looks at six of the next generation that we think it wise to keep an eye on.

Giancarlo Giorgetti (born in Cazzago Brabbia (Lombardy), December 16, 1966, married to Laura Ferrari)

¶2. (C) Numerous political contacts speculate that Giorgetti is the logical successor to Bossi because of his impeccable LN pedigree, ironclad personal ties with the boss, and extensive experience in Rome. He is the national secretary of the Lombard League (LN,s "flagship" regional branch) and comes from Varese, the hometown of LN heavyweights including Bossi and current Interior Minister Roberto Maroni. With a degree in economics from Milan's prestigious Bocconi University, Giorgetti is sharp and well-respected both inside and outside of his party. He was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1996 and has been reelected in each subsequent session. He served as president of the powerful Treasury Committee from 2001-06, and from 2008 to the present (he served as vice president of the Committee when the center-right was in the opposition from 2006-08). He has also served on the Foreign Affairs Committee and is a member of the Italian Parliamentary delegation to NATO.

Flavio Tosi (born in Verona (Veneto), June 18, 1969, married to Stefania Villanova)

¶3. (C) Tosi began his political career in 1995 when he was elected to the Verona city council. From 1997 to 2003 he served as provincial secretary for the LN. He held the office of regional health assessore until June 25, 2007, when he resigned to become mayor of Verona. Although Tosi has a history of fiery rhetoric and populist action (or trouble-making depending on one's viewpoint), he is an efficient administrator and has a strong base of supporters due to his attention to detail. He has earned kudos from Veronese voters in particular for cleaning up the streets and public spaces through a "zero-tolerance" campaign against crime and delinquency. As a measure of his personal popularity and the success of his anti-crime image, Tosi recently was given direct supervision of the local police (a role held normally by the central government's Prefect). This pilot project, launched by Minister Maroni, should give Mayor Tosi a further opportunity to burnish his image in Verona and Veneto as a "Law and Order" candidate.

¶4. (C) As noted in reftel, Tosi is a front-runner (along with Luca Zaia, see below) to become regional governor of Veneto in elections next March. This is important for the United States since Veneto is one of Italy's economic powerhouses and hosts Vicenza army base (the headquarters of Africom's army component and soon to be the home of the re-consolidated 173rd airborne brigade). Perhaps in pursuit of this political step up, Tosi is trying to construct a more moderate image by strengthening his ties with the United States -- making himself regularly available to meet with U.S. diplomats and publicizing our trips to the Verona area in the local media. Though considered to be one of the more controversial Leghisti on matters of immigration, Tosi has also stated publicly that immigrants who work legally are a necessary part of the economy of Veneto and Italy.

¶5. (C) Tosi was recently convicted of violating the Mancino law (which condemns racist slogans, actions, or gestures during political campaigns) for a petition he organized in

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2001 urging citizens to support the removal of a Roma camp outside Verona. However, his two-month sentence was suspended and the court wiped the conviction from his permanent record. Considering the anti-immigrant political mood in Italy, and the strength of the LN's position in Veneto, this conviction, which he has been portrayed as another "abuse of justice" at the hands of "activist" and "left-wing" judges, is likely to bolster his image among his power base. We have no evidence one way or the other on the alleged politicization of the lengthy legal procedure.

¶6. (C) Though Tosi is not one of the "Lombard League," Bossi's original party and the nucleus of the Northern League, he is head of the "Veneto League" component of the LN and is trusted and liked by Bossi. Tosi is reportedly influential in LN policymaking both regionally and nationally. Should he not be elected regional governor in 2010, contacts say he would likely get a national ministerial role.

Luca Zaia (born in Bibano (Veneto), March 27, 1968, married to Raffaella)

¶7. (C) Minister of Agriculture Zaia entered politics in 1995 as the Treviso provincial councilmember for agriculture. He was provincial president from 1998-2005 and regional vice president of Veneto until becoming minister in 2008, and is considered one of the two frontrunners (alongside Mayor Tosi) for the governorship of Veneto in 2010. His position as Minister of Agriculture is an important placement for LN and especially the Veneto region. He is an active promoter of the small and medium-sized enterprises that are the backbone of Veneto's and Italy's economy. We note that Zaia is probably one of LN's most "palatable" leaders. He is very sharp and pragmatic, but is not as publicly well-known as Tosi, for instance. Zaia is well-educated (a graduate of one of the

country's top oenological institutes and of the University of Udine) and has shown himself able to tackle large problems and forge important agreements. He is also a fantastic public speaker (especially off-the-cuff). We witnessed him talk circles around a political rival, current Veneto Governor Giancarlo Galan, during a recent public event.

18. (C) Zaia may very well become governor of Veneto, though contacts tell us he is not interested in the job. However, we don't believe he is a serious candidate to replace Bossi because he is not one of the insiders of the Lombard League.

Matteo Salvini (born in Milan, March 9, 1973, separated)

19. (C) Salvini is a firebrand populist and professional journalist with a hand in LN's press message. He is responsible for the majority of youth interaction on behalf of LN due to his roots as a DJ on Radio Padania, the local LN radio station. He was first elected to the Milan city council in 1993 and is currently the leader of the LN in the council. He is vice secretary of the LN national party alongside Marco Reguzzoni (see below). Salvini was in the European Parliament from 2004-06, the Italian Chamber of Deputies in 2008, and was elected again to the European Parliament in June 2009. The international press recently speculated that his resignation from the Italian parliament was in reaction to his recitation in a beer tent of an anti-Neapolitan song. However, in fact, Salvini's resignation was necessary to accept his new appointment in Brussels, not a result of pressure over his comments. The media also made much of a public pronouncement by Salvini in May 2009 that there should be Milan subway cars designated for Milan citizens only.

110. (C) Because Salvini's role to date has largely been mouthpiece and "provocateur," it is difficult to know for sure his personal positions. Publicly he is always on the radical end of the spectrum, but he has never had to put his policies in action because he has never held local administrative office above city councilmember. Nonetheless, Salvini is a leading light in the core Lombard League and was present at the creation of the Northern League. With some national political experience under his belt, now, Salvini is likely to play a more important policy role within the party.

Massimo Giordano (born in Novara (Piedmont), September 16, 1969, married to Simona Castellani)

111. (C) Giordano joined the LN in 1996 and served as an assessore in Novara beginning in 1997. He has been mayor of Novara (Piedmont's second-largest city after Turin) since 2001, winning re-election by a large margin in 2006. A lawyer by profession, Giordano was elected to office by supporters across party lines (Piedmont is traditionally a

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Democratic Party stronghold) due to his reputation as a pragmatic leader. His ability to gain support and build consensus without resorting to LN's typical incendiary tactics make him a bastion of moderation within the party.

112. (C) Though less populist than Tosi, Giordano is also an intense personality. His attention to detail and the importance he places on personal relationships with his constituents has worked well for LN. Contacts believe that in 2011 at the conclusion of Giordano's second, and final, term he will certainly try for national office. Giordano is planning to go to the United States on an International Visitor program in 2010.

Marco Reguzzoni (born in Busto Arsizio (Lombardy), May 30, 1971, married to Elena)

113. (C) Reguzzoni stands out a bit from the others on this list as he is a successful businessman as well as a career politician. He has a degree in engineering management from Politecnico di Milano and since 1995 has worked as a business

consultant and helped start Biocell Center, a multi-national stem cell research company (with a branch in Boston). He also worked with the committee that brought Expo 2015 to Milan. Reguzzoni was a participant in an International Visitor Program in 2005.

¶14. (C) At the same time, Reguzzoni has been a hard-core member of LN, joining the Lombard League in 1986 at the age of 15. Since 2007 he has shared with Salvini the post of vice secretary of LN. Reguzzoni's first political job was in the city council of Busto Arsizio, where he served from 1993-97 before being elected to the Varese provincial council. In 2002 he was the youngest person elected as the president of Varese province, a politically influential province as it hosts Milan's Malpensa International Airport. Varese, as mentioned earlier, is also a key city in the LN mythology because it has produced several LN senior leaders. Reguzzoni served as president until 2008, when he stepped down to run -- successfully -- for the Chamber of Deputies.

¶15. (C) Reguzzoni's father-in-law has family connections to Bossi and for this reason Reguzzoni was pulled into LN politics at a young age and is extremely loyal to Bossi. Like the others listed here, Reguzzoni was extremely popular in his administrative positions for his effective civic management style and ability to tackle popular issues. Although moderate in his rhetoric and policies, Reguzzoni has a personal and emotional bond to LN's core positions (particularly support for small business and fiscal federalism). We believe that Reguzzoni could very well be on track for more senior regional political positions. Despite his ties to Bossi and LN, however, we've not heard him spoken of as someone in line for a major national role in the near term.

Comment: Will The Young Inherit the Party?

¶16. (C) Naturally this cable does not look at all possible future leaders of LN. However, it does give an idea of the factors that are key to moving up in the party: a Veneto or Lombardy background, loyalty to and a strong personal relationship with Bossi, and evidence of administrative competence. Education is not essential, with these up-and-comers evenly split between college and high-school grads, nor is extensive Rome experience. Finally, we should note that while LN apparently does see the value of grooming young talent for national success, something that the other Italian mainstream parties don't do as well, it's unlikely that when Bossi dies his immediate circle of older ""colonels"" will turn over the reins right away.

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